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Third Series, No. 8.

GUNBOAT SERVICE ON THE NANSEMOND.
FRANK B. BUTTS.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

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REMINISCENCES
OF
GUNBOAT SERVICE
ON THE NANSEMOND,

BY
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The fourth day of January, 1863, I went on board the United States ship "Brandywine," in Hampton Roads, Virginia, with the surviving crew of the wrecked iron-clad steamer "Monitor," for a settlement of accounts, and to be supplied with food and clothes. The only clothing I had was a flannel jumper, a pair of trousers, and stockings. As some others of those rescued from the disaster did not have any more, and none had a complete suit, we were unfit for sea service at that season of the year. Owing to delay in making up the accounts of the crew, it was nearly two months before any clothing was issued, and notwithstanding we were partially furnished by the kind-hearted sailors of the "Brandywine," we were in a most destitute condition.

Our suffering for these necessities and for hammocks was constantly wearing upon our health, and great dissatisfaction and growling prevailed. At last, in about two months we were allowed to draw new clothing from the ship. This transaction, together with my first fit-out, cost me nearly a hundred dollars, which made me indebted to the government in quite a sum,—I mean quite a sum for a landsman at the rate of twelve dollars per month to pay. With this and a subsequent loss of my clothes I should have owed the government twenty dollars when my time was out, if I had not been promoted and received increased pay. Soldiers have a liberal allowance for clothing, but man-of-war's-men are charged with everything they get, except food and hammock.

The "Monitor's" crew was then distributed among different vessels of the squadron, and I, with three old shipmates and four men from the rendezvous, or shipping office, were given passage on the transport steamer "Argo," with orders to report to the commander of the gunboat "Stepping Stones," then lying at Suffolk, in the Nansemond river. We bade farewell to our old comrades, not one of whom

I have since seen, and left Hampton Roads about noon. Owing to a very low tide when we entered the Nansemond, and the seemingly persistent efforts of our pilot to run across the sand-bars, we did not reach Suffolk until late at night. After landing on the wharf we hailed the "Stepping Stones," and, in answer to our explanations, a boat was sent for us and we were taken aboard. I had been intrusted with the responsibility of the party, and at once reported to the commander, delivered some papers and the mail, and, without ceremony or opportunity to see the faces of those on deck, or learn what kind of a vessel the "Stepping Stones" was, we were shown to the berth-deck. I was not long in hanging my hammock and getting into it. After a few words with some persons in their hammocks whom I could not see, I went to sleep and heard nothing more until all hands were piped up the next morning.

When I had been on deck and made the acquaintance of the men who were to be my companions, I was delighted; for during my service in the navy I had been thrown in contact with men not at all agreeable, and on one vessel I could hardly find an asso-

ciate. The crew of the "Stepping Stones" were all young men, some were seamen, that is, they had been to sea before, while the others had lived near the sea-coast and knew something about a vessel before they entered the navy. They had entered the service from purely patriotic motives. I was never associated with such a fine body of men while either in the army or navy.

The "Stepping Stones" was what was known in the navy as a "ferry gunboat." Her armament consisted of eight twelve and twenty-four pounder smooth-bore and two twelve-pounder brass rifled howitzer cannons. They were mounted at either end of the vessel, and in action the whole battery could be trained toward the enemy, so that we had a broadside of ten guns, which was very formidable for a river gunboat. She also carried more than the usual quantity of small arms, in order to repel night attacks, which were not infrequent to vessels lying in narrow rivers. Muskets, hand-grenades, boarding-pikes, cutlasses, carbines and revolvers were always kept in hand or ready for use on ship, on picket, or for expeditions on shore. Those ac-

quainted with the history of such vessels will not dispute the words of Admiral S. P. Lee, that the crews of the river gunboats did more fighting and suffered more from the trials and exposure of war, than any other men, either in the army or navy

The vessel was of light draft, and having both ends alike could navigate the smallest streams. I have known her to pass through such a narrow place that the water could not be seen by looking over the guards on either side, and both wheels would be digging into the mud in order to force a passage; and many times our boats were swept from their davits by the branches of trees. Previous to the attack on Suffolk by the confederate General Longstreet, our duties were to patrol the river in order to arrest those trying to cross, or carrying on trade or delivering messages to the enemy, it being the dividing line of our forces, and also to protect the inhabitants on our side from rebel raiders.

The Nausemond has its source in the Dismal Swamp, southeast of Suffolk, and is merely a rivulet until it reaches Suffolk, where it becomes navigable for vessels of light draft. The river seems to be

nearly on a level with tide-water ; and bordering as it does on swampy lands, on one side or the other, its bed is left nearly bare at low water for a distance of three miles below or north of Suffolk, and if it were not for a sand-bar at a point made by the entrance of another stream, the river would be entirely drained. From this locality (Hill's Point, as it was known to us,) the river broadens to an average width of about a mile, and although the water is quite shallow except in the channel, it bears a pleasing prospect. The farms have an appearance of thrift and good management, and the dwellings and surrounding buildings have an unusual air of comfort and enterprise.

When the confederate force laid siege to Suffolk, I had been on the "Stepping Stones" about two months, and was well acquainted with all on board, and in the line of my duties I had learned the habits and the war sentiments of the people living near the river. Our work was principally at night, made necessarily so by the rebels, or those who were in league with them in carrying on trade across the river. Their plans were to watch the movements of the vessel,

and, by a well understood code of signals, arranged by passing a window with a lamp, they would cross the river, where they would meet friends and where wares would be exchanged for money, and mails taken into the rebel lines. It always seemed strange to me that this border between the conflicting territories should be so imperfectly guarded. It would not have been difficult for a cunning man to pass between Washington and Richmond continuously by this route. Our duties were to break up these operations, and to arrest those engaged therein when they were crossing the river; or, if the darkness was unfavorable, to capture them on shore. But it was only owing to some clumsy action of their own, like using lighted signals, that we ever caught them. Could it be expected of a single vessel to guard a narrow river a distance of eighteen miles against these communications? The most effectual way of preventing them was to destroy all the boats to be found, and we were so diligent in this work that the conspirators carried their boats on wagons to a safe distance within their lines.

The season was the opening of spring, the most

delightful of a southern climate. The trees were fresh in their mantles of green, and the roses were in bloom. We had enjoyed all the pleasures of gunboat service, and were more than an ordinarily happy crew. Nothing was thought of our daily duties, nor had we any care for the future. I have letters that were written to my parents at the period of which I am about to write, giving an account of each day's proceedings, by the aid of which I will commence a history of events during the siege of Suffolk.

I was dispatched from the vessel on the afternoon of the eighth of April, 1863, with orders to go as near Petersburg as necessary, to learn if any preparations were being made indicating an advance of troops. I proceeded alone, and by ten o'clock at night had reached Wakefield, a village, or rather station, on the Norfolk and Petersburg railroad. I made this point for the purpose of calling on a Union gentleman with whom I was acquainted, and from whom I expected to learn something concerning my errand. I was not disappointed in seeing him, and after some conversation he furnished me with a guide, an old colored servant, and told me where I

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might learn all that I desired. I followed my guide several miles before a halt was made, and after a severe thumping on the door of a cabin among the negro quarters of a plantation, we were admitted. After a strict questioning, during which I could not in the darkness see my guide, on whom my hand rested, a light was called for and immediately furnished. I was surprised to find myself in the midst of a great number of colored people. As I turned my head, I saw nothing but faces and glaring eyes turned towards me. A middle-aged man appeared to have charge of the meeting. No general conversation was indulged in, and only in a very low voice did he address me, or answer my questions. Occasionally I heard the rap of an outside sentinel, indicating that all was well. A water-bucket was placed over the candle, concealing the light in such a manner that only a circle of light covering the table was admitted into the room. I learned from these people that the confederate soldiers had been actively engaged that day in repairing the railroad, and the meeting was held by these slaves to consider the question of escaping to the Union lines. I told them

they would not suffer in our hands ; that thousands of their people had taken this refuge from slavery, and that provision had been made for their support if they chose to leave their masters ; that their freedom would be the result of the war, and that they would never be returned to bondage,—a penalty they seemed to dread, and the only doubt which they were anxious to have decided. What I said to them settled their views and confirmed their understanding of the cause of the war, and during the following few days great numbers of them came into our lines. Some were taken across the river in our boats, and several months later I was recognized in Norfolk by a man who said he saw me at that meeting.

When I had learned all I wished, I started with my guide to return. I could not help thinking as we traveled towards the river : How did our people at the head of military affairs know that Longstreet's corps was to be taken from Lee's army and commence an assault on Suffolk ? It seemed a most profound mystery. Longstreet had not then left Lee's army, and how our people could contemplate such a movement was beyond my comprehension.

They did know of it, or my instructions would not have been to give notice of such an advance.

At sunset of the next day, Donnelly and myself were dispatched with orders similar to those given me the night preceding, to investigate the progress of the enemy's advance. We did not go many miles to learn this. When we reached Zuni, a station where the railroad to Norfolk crosses the Blackwater river, we found an advance picket post of the enemy. Not fearing any danger from the soldiers we saw standing guard on the opposite side of the stream, we made an inspection of the bridge, which was found to be repaired in quite a substantial manner, and relaid with timbers and rails. There were also several cars loaded with what we supposed to be material for further execution of the work.

On the afternoon of the eleventh, the "Stepping Stones" went up the river to Suffolk, where, during the night, our troops were withdrawn from across the river, and the bridge in front of the town was destroyed.

On the morning of the twelfth there was great activity within our lines, and fortifications seemed to

have risen on the banks of the river as if by magic. Several gunboats, including the Admiral's dispatch boat "Philadelphia," a side-wheel steamer, with the fleet captain and senior officer aboard, and two or three steam transports arrived at Suffolk. After drill, the "Stepping Stones" steamed down the river, leaving a large Union force hurriedly working to build defences, and about four o'clock in the afternoon we left our anchorage and started to return. As the vessel entered the narrow part of the river, and when within about three miles of Suffolk, we noticed a dwelling-house in the distance to be in flames, which indicated an action between the rebels and our pickets. Nearly all our men were on deck viewing the fire when we were attacked by a large number of rebel infantry, who poured among us a simultaneous shower of lead. We were almost stunned, but the prompt command of our captain: "Get to your guns, men!" brought every one into his place for action. The enemy had not time to reload their guns when we commenced firing canister shot, and they were silenced. The vessel did not change her speed, and a turn in the river soon brought

us out of range of the riflemen. As we proceeded we were brought near a high bluff covered with trees, among which the sharpshooters were well protected, and for more than a mile of the passage we were under a continuous fire of musketry. The bullets flew as thick as hail over our heads, and flattened against the gun carriages, or tore through the light woodwork. The men worked without excitement, and stuck to the guns with the greatest nerve. This was our first time under fire, and it proved well the efficiency of our discipline and drill. The order to cease firing was given when we were again out of range, and before the decks were in order the vessel came to anchor at Suffolk.

Our captain reported at once to the flag officer, and before he could get back, and the anchor was up, all the vessels in the fleet, except a side-wheel transport that had not unloaded, were underway, heading down the river. This movement brought us in rear of three gunboats and three transports, a position not to be solicited in such circumstances. If we were ahead, there would be no danger of being blocked behind a disabled vessel; and as the nar-

rowness of the channel would not permit the passage of two vessels, it would have been a serious affair, perhaps the loss of our vessel, if such an accident had happened.

The "Stepping Stones" was considerable distance behind when the firing commenced between the enemy and the leading vessels. We commenced as soon as within range, using shell. As we got nearer, and having an enfilading fire, shrapnell shell was used, which for a time silenced the enemy's fire. As the vessel advanced, we shortened the time of the fuses until canister was used. The vessel moved slowly, on account of sharp turns in the river, and for nearly half an hour we were within a few yards of the rebel infantry, who kept out of sight among the bushes and trees. The smoke from our cannon was the only protection for the men, and but for that the enemy would have driven us from the decks.

When the vessel was very near the shore, and in the hottest of the fight, a boy named Lane, who was close by me holding his thumb over the vent of the next gun, cried out: "See that cuss, there; he just shot at me." Being about ready to fire my gun, and

attracted by his exclamation, I looked in the direction indicated, and saw a man wearing the confederate gray take deliberate aim and fire. I placed a primer in the gun, which, as the vessel moved forward, was brought to bear directly upon him. As the gun was discharged, Lane fell wounded to the deck. We were so close to the shore that leaves from the trees were blown back on the vessel, and when the smoke had cleared away, nothing but a bare spot could be seen where the rebel soldier had stood. What became of him can only be imagined. I never saw an instance of more pluck or real heroism than was displayed by this boy. It can be truly said that he was looking into the barrel of the rebel musket, and yet he refused to take his thumb from the vent, or dodge, or leave his post to save a wound, or his life, until the man loading the gun had stepped aside.

The next day, the twelfth of May, 1863, was the most eventful one in my war experience, and one that will never be forgotten by those who were on the Nansemond. In the morning we were joined by other gunboats, and as they may be said to have

composed the fleet, I give the names of the different vessels as near as I can now recollect them. They constituted a part of the James river and Potomac flotilla, and were all light draft steamers. The "Mount Washington," commanded by Lieutenant Commander and Senior Officer Lamson; the "Commodore Barney," Lieutenant Commander Cushing, of the "Albemarle" fame; the "Yankee," Lieutenant Commander Thomas P. Ives, well known to every Rhode Islander, as well as the name given to his vessel on the Potomac, viz.: "The Fighting Yankee." Not the least among them is the one I am proud to mention as being on board of, "The Stepping Stones," Lieutenant C. C. Harris. There were also the tugs "Cordelin," "Zouave," and "Dandelion." During different periods there were other vessels with us, but they were not at any time engaged in battle. After a quiet rest at night from the fatigue of the previous day, and our usual breakfast, the decks were cleared and preparations made for another fight with the enemy. The "Mount Washington," "Stepping Stones," "Dandelion" and "Zouave" got underway and started up the river.

We expected the enemy had moved down to the river in force during the night, and that we should have a warm reception. In this we were not mistaken. At Hill's Point was a row of piles which had been driven across the river by the enemy before our troops took possession of Norfolk. Through this we had to pass, and the shallow water covering a sand-bar prevented the vessels not mentioned from accompanying us.

We proceeded slowly, occasionally dropping a shell into suspicious places in order to draw the enemy's fire, or to give notice of our approach, but got no reply until we came to a sharp turn in the river which was swept for a long distance by rebel batteries behind strong earthworks that had been erected during the night. The enemy did not greet us with a shot or two, as is the usual custom, in order to get range, but they gave us a complete salvo of artillery that made the nerves tingle, and brave men crouched down in fear of bursting shells. The "Mount Washington" being in the advance was the first to come under fire. The battle was opened with fury at once, and an effort made to silence the

rebel batteries. But they had too many guns for us, besides being substantially protected. I thought for awhile the vessels would be knocked into pieces before we could change our position, as every shot seemed to hit one or the other of the vessels. Going back a short distance a slight protection was found for the hulls of the vessels behind a point of land, and from this position we fired as rapidly as we could for, perhaps, half an hour. I never was exposed to such an artillery fire before or since. It seemed as if the whole atmosphere was filled with deadly sounds. The sharp shriek of solid shot, the shrill of Whitworth rifled shot, the noise of elongated shell that seemed to flutter above our heads then explode with a loud report and scatter its deadly fragments of cragged pieces of iron with a quick hum and buzz among us, produced a medley of sounds too thrilling and terrible to be described, and which I have not yet forgotten.

While all this was going on, the "Mount Washington" had a shot pierce her boiler, and was run on shore to protect the crew from scalding by the escaping steam. The rebels, who were about half a

mile from us, thinking the vessel was on fire, sent up cheer after cheer in that effeminate voice so peculiar to southern troops, and, giving fresh vigor to their work, made fearful havoc on our side. In the midst of the descending shot and shell, the "Stepping Stones" went forward to the "Mount Washington," and as it would have been imprudent for our light built vessels to remain under such a fire, we made fast to her and took her in tow down the river. Owing to casualties on the "Stepping Stones," the crew of the disabled steamer, numbering about forty men, were transferred. There were none too many, however, for later in the day we had to be supplied again. As the vessels retired down the river, the "Mount Washington" broke her helm, or became unmanageable owing to damage done by the enemy's shot, and when we reached Hill's Point she veered from the channel and ran hard and fast on shore. The two tugboats tried in vain to tow her off. The tide had begun to fall, and nothing could be done except wait till another full tide. The enemy were not slow to observe the situation. They posted two full batteries of field artillery in different positions ;

and a regiment of infantry crept through the brush to within close range of the stranded vessel. The "Stepping Stones" had a double duty to perform. The artillery endeavored to destroy the disabled steamer with shot and shell, and the infantry were equally determined to board and fire the vessel, which lay high and dry out of water for several hours. The gunboats had no trouble in silencing the artillery and forcing them to change their position. A few men voluntarily stayed on board the "Mount Washington" to repel any attempt to board her, but only once in a while could they fire a shot from the only gun available, the others being completely covered by rebel rifles. The "Stepping Stones" lay where her guns swept a portion of the shore unprotected by bushes for the enemy, and at a distance varying from fifty to two hundred yards from the hidden riflemen. The other gunboats not being of light draft enough to manœuvre in this part of the river, kept the artillery quiet from their position, a half mile further down the river, and an occasional shell from their nine-inch guns exploding among the sharpshooters had a very quieting effect, and assisted us in keeping them at bay.

In this position the fleet was engaged from noon until night without rest. The "Stepping Stones," as if angry to devour the rebels, or determined to rout them, would move forward within short canister range, but I think the enemy always got the best of us in these movements, they having dug holes in the earth, which protected them from injury, except from heavy shells. The loss was not trifling to us; three times we sent away the wounded to vessels down the river, and as many times were supplied with more men. It was a galling fire for so many hours. When the tide had flowed to its full height, the "Stepping Stones" endeavored to get a line to the unfortunate steamer, but was driven off. There were so many rifles covering the two vessels that one brave and daring sailor, too gallant for such a death, fell riddled with bullets, in attempting to pass a tow-line.

After a third trial the line was lassoed on to a fastening, and the "Mount Washington" was being towed out of her peril, when the tow-line parted by being hit, it was said, with a rebel shot. However, in another attempt we succeeded in making a per-

manent fastening, and the flag-ship was towed down the river amid the cheers of the whole fleet. It was almost sunset when the firing ceased.

Nothing in the events of the rebellion has to me so sad a reflection as the havoc of that day. It is sorrowful to recall the names of those brave and patriotic men who fell on the decks of the "Stepping Stones." As stated in the beginning of this paper, the crew of the "Stepping Stones" were of exceptional character for men in the navy during the war. They had left happy homes and entered the service from patriotic motives. That day nearly half the number, and many who had been sent from other vessels, fell, pierced by rebel bullets. One of them, a boy of my own age, and a most intimate companion, died in my arms while I was attending him during a lull in the fight. In his death I realized for the first time the sadness and cruelty of war. Besides the loss of men, it did not seem possible for a vessel to be so completely riddled with shot and shell and escape being sunk or disabled by damage to machinery. Our pilot-houses, there being one at each end of the vessel, drew a large portion of the

musket shots. The pilots, however, were securely protected by iron plates that lined the inside of the houses, but the woodwork on the outside was cut to pieces. The "Commodore Barney" was hit several times with shot and shell, and exploded a hundred-pounder rifled gun in the action. The other vessels were somewhat damaged, but being at long range did not suffer like the "Stepping Stones," and none were disabled except the "Mount Washington."

Early on the morning of the thirteenth of April the dead and wounded were conveyed in a steamer to Newport News for burial or treatment. The "Stepping Stones" took on board thirty-three men who had volunteered from the Admiral's ship, the "Minnesota," at Hampton Roads. They left their ship, where they had spent an inactive life, not knowing the realities of war, and expecting to have a frolic. But when shipmates saw those who had left their ship the day before, happy and full of joy at being released from their confinement, now dead, or carefully handled, while groans and shrieks of pain told of suffering from a shattered limb or a mortal wound, a sadder feeling was observed to pass

over these men. One, a young man who was placed in my charge, was so overcome by the spectacle that he never spoke after he went aboard, and before night fell dead at his gun.

The decks were cleaned and repairs made to resume the work. At nine o'clock the signal was given to get underway. Our anchor had to be raised by the use of a tackling, and while the men were thus engaged on the forward deck, a volley was fired by a party of a hundred or more rebel infantry who had concealed themselves during the night on a point of land about one hundred yards from the vessel. The crew were thrown into confusion, and many fell dead or wounded without a thought of being in danger. The cable was let go without further attempt to raise the anchor, and the vessel moved out of range. This cowardly assault of the enemy enraged every man in the fleet, and preparations were hastily made to punish them. The "Commodore Barney" took a position so as to prevent escape from the point occupied by the rebels. The "Stepping Stones," "Cordelin" and "Zouave" advanced to within short range, and with shrapnell and canister

raked the ambuscade with such a tempest of iron that it would seem impossible for any of the rebels to escape. I saw a number at different times jump up from the long grass to run, but the next moment they would disappear before a shower of canister hurled at them by some of our gunners. This, and the action of the previous day, taught the rebels in Longstreet's army not to attack a gunboat with infantry unless well protected; and the "Stepping Stones," while on the Nansemond, was never again attacked except by a few bushwhackers.

At noon the fleet started up the river. When the scene of the previous day's engagement was reached it was found that the enemy had erected an earth-work which commanded the narrow passage and a long range down the river. A battle with this battery was immediately commenced. The "Stepping Stones" moved forward and backward in front of the enemy without intermission, until late in the afternoon, when we retired without success. The object was to silence the guns of the battery and to force a passage up the river. The damage to the vessel was considerable, as the enemy's guns were

well trained. The casualties were less than on the previous day, but I had no means of learning how many. Our bulwarks had been completely shot away in this and other engagements by our own cannon, in depressing them to the rebel infantry, who were hid close to the shore. Some of the hammocks, including my own, had been piled up for protection. During the hottest of the engagement these took fire, and to prevent the flames from spreading over the vessel, they were thrown overboard. My clothes-bag had been used to obstruct the recoil of a cannon, and that went with my bedding; so for the second time in seven months I had to sleep on deck, and had only one suit of clothes. "Lucky to have that," I said to one of the crew who had met the same loss and was grumbling about it. "Lucky not to be sewed up in a canvas one," said a chap more sensible. "I hope I shall have a chance to wear mine out," added another.

At one time during the most exciting part of the day, a shotman got a shot into my gun before the cartridge, temporarily disabling it. While I was holding up the trail, and other men were assisting in

drawing the charge, the carriage was hit with a solid shot, and the gun knocked to the other side of the deck. At the same time a shower of bullets drove the men from the forward deck. The first I noticed, after a seemingly unconscious moment, was our flag drooping from the flag-staff, the halyards having been cut off by a bullet. Mr. Lawrence, our executive officer, whom I have neglected to mention before, rushed across the deck with a yell, "Come along, boys," and seizing the halyards hauled up the flag, and quickly making them fast, turned to order his men again, but found they had followed him and were at work.

At this time three powdermen were waiting to deliver their ammunition, and taking charge of another gun I heard the order, "Give them canister—double rounds!" A third was inserted into the gun; the last not having the cartridge separated, stuck out of the muzzle about four inches. I threw double stoppers under the wheels of the carriage, and cried out, "*Stand clear!*" Giving the lockstring a pull, I saw the gun go backwards from me, and was enveloped in a whirlwind of fire and smoke; at the

same time the gun that had been dismounted went tumbling across the deck. The lieutenant had double-loaded and discharged it by placing the muzzle on the cap-log of the deck. When I found my gun it stood upright against the engine-room. As I was removing it, I looked over the iron plating that protected the engineer and saw him lying flat on the floor, with his nose so near it that he could not see sideways, and with one hand on the crank that worked the engine. After the fight I heard him relate the incident, in the course of which he said that the plating was not quite high enough, so he sat down, but he thought once that the rebels had shot a log cabin at us, or we had been run into by another vessel.

April fourteenth. The only vessels remaining on the Nansemond were the "Commodore Barney," "Stepping Stones," "Zouave" and "Cordelin," the others having gone during the night to the York river, where the enemy were threatening an attack on our troops. All was quiet that morning in the fleet, except the removal of the dead and wounded and receiving new men from vessels at Hampton Roads.

At noon the three vessels, not including the "Barney," started up the river, determined to run the rebel battery at Hill's Point. They were not to engage the battery except as they passed it. The "Stepping Stones" was first to start, and although the firing of the enemy was sharp, we should have run by safely if we had not been obliged to return to the assistance of the "Cordelin," which was disabled by a shot that struck the wheel-house, killing two pilots and demolishing the wheel. We did not go back, however, any further. In the midst of the firing we made fast to the disabled vessel and towed her past the battery up the river.

The damage to the vessels proved to be slight, although the rebels made some good shots. Both the other vessels were hit several times. Our pilot house was hit twice, but without injury to the pilots. There were numerous riflemen that kept up a steady fire upon us, and stuck like bees, as they were out of sight and our firing did them no harm. One of the incidents of the fight in which courage was displayed and deserves mention, happened to one of our firemen named Sullivan. He had been accustomed

in every engagement to post himself behind a barricade of hammocks near the cabin door, where he had made a loophole, and did good execution with a breech-loading rifle. But this time he was unfortunate. A rebel got sight of him. Sullivan saw the fellow take aim and fire. The bullet struck Sullivan on the left hand, lacerating three fingers. With a portion of his hand hanging by the flesh and covering himself with blood, Sullivan stepped out in full view, and drawing his rifle to his shoulder, took sure aim and avenged himself, for the rebel was seen to reel and fall. It is not often that a case of this kind can be recorded, as a wounded man will, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, drop his gun and get out of the fight.

The most particular accident of the day was an explosion on the "Stepping Stones." There were two cases of fixed ammunition ; that is, the cartridge and shell were attached. They were in the gangway, where they had accumulated from changing the time of fuse, owing to the movements of the vessel, or in using canister. There must have been between twenty and thirty shells and nearly fifty pounds of

powder in these cases, when a shell from the rebel battery crashed through them. A terrible explosion followed. The upper deck was blown into the air, and the rebels, who thought it was our magazine, and that the "Stepping Stones" would trouble them no more, everlastingly cheered. The only fatal result of the accident was to a pilot who was at the farther end of the vessel. He was hit in the thigh by a fragment of a shell, from which he died. I often think, and sometimes hear, stories of how hardened men will get amid scenes of blood, but this reminds me of an incident that I never knew paralleled. This poor, wounded man had crept to the hatchway, but before any attention had been given him, a man named Smith, who was hurriedly passing, stepped into a mass of clotted blood that surrounded the wounded man, and slipped, falling upon the deck. As he regained his footing, he stroked the blood from his clothes with his hand, and looking very angrily at the dying man, said: "Why in h—l don't you get into the sick-bay; I came near breaking my d—d neck."

The three vessels, "Stepping Stones," "Cordelin"

and "Zouave," remained above Hill's Point for several days. A hill between where the vessels lay and the rebel battery kept us quiet, and an extensive marsh and swamp, through which no troops could march, protected us from any assault. The lines of both armies were then established. The enemy had advanced to the river north of Suffolk, and commenced their works on all the favorable positions from Hill's Point, which was the left of their line of fortifications. General Peck commanded the federal forces, with General Getty on the right of his line along the river. At this point both sides of the river presented a continuous line of extensive earthworks, but I saw nothing of the operations farther south than Fort Providence, or the bridge that crossed the Nansemond at Suffolk.

While the gunboats were lying up the river, the enemy were planning to control the channel and to destroy them if an attempt was made to pass the battery. Our commanders were studying how to capture the battery, and so the game was being played. The vessels would occasionally go near enough to drop a shell into the battery, but not to

bring on much of an engagement. During the night of the seventeenth, I went with a boat's crew to find a landing place for the steamer in rear of the battery. It was very dark, and the greatest care was taken not to be heard by the enemy's pickets that guarded the shore. A landing place was found, and a boy named Jones was left on shore with a dark lantern while the boat returned to the vessel. For some reason the troops that were to be taken aboard did not arrive as soon as was intended, and not till after midnight did we get ready to start. When the vessel was seen by Jones, he showed his light, indicating that all was quiet, and the place to land. The vessel was run ashore, and the troops, numbering about five hundred men, a part of a Connecticut regiment, jumped off, and formed to advance. Donnelly and myself were detailed to guide them. We were going ahead nicely, as appeared to us, when a rocket was discharged, a signal to retreat. The soldiers had acted timidly, and either on account of the darkness, or because they were recruits, or whatever the reason may have been, they made the quickest right-about that I ever witnessed, and came near

breaking their necks in the scramble to get back to the vessel. I was astonished at being so suddenly left alone, and knew of no cause for the skedaddle. As I turned to go back I was joined by some other sailors, from whom it was learned that while some of the soldiers were poking along, a man, probably a rebel picket who had lain down in the grass for a snooze, was stumbled upon, and, springing up from beneath their feet, he escaped into the darkness.

The next night, the eighteenth, we took troops aboard for another attempt to surprise the battery, but after an hour's drifting about the river, the attack was abandoned, the reason for which I did not understand.

The next day we advanced up the river and threw a few shot into some tree-tops where the enemy had posted their signal men, and also into some troops that were seen moving across a field.

On the twentieth of the month (April), all the sailors who could be spared from the gunboats, and two companies of infantry from each of the Eighth Connecticut and Eighty-ninth New York, were sent to the "Stepping Stones." The vessel had been pre-

pared by the use of some old sails in such a manner that the enemy could not see there were any extra men aboard. The rebels had trained their guns to sweep the channel, as they thought we would try to run out at night, and their position was defenceless in any other direction. This was made known to us by the daring boy, Jones, who crept near enough to the battery to ascertain the fact, while he was awaiting the arrival of the vessel, on the first night of our attempt.

When the gunboats were ready to advance, the "Commodore Barney" opened fire from her position down the river, and the "Cordelin" and "Zouave" steamed towards the fort, at the same time opening fire. The enemy made no reply, nor could we get them to change the direction they had trained their guns. Our firing, however, had a better effect. It kept the rebels close in their bomb-proofs, and prevented their watching our movements. As the vessels neared the battery, a hill cut off the enemy's view of the river, while the "Stepping Stones" passed the other gunboats and kept out of sight until a road was reached leading to the rear of the fort,

where the vessel was run ashore. The officers and soldiers leaped from the vessel, and two twelve-pounder howitzers manned by sailors were run off, and they started together by the road to the rear of the fort.

A few foolishly brave fellows, not the least among whom was myself, managed a plan of attack on our own account. It was a lesson we ought not to have forgotten. Volmer, Donnelly and myself understood the approaches to the battery better than any one else, having been over the ground many times. We got thirty or more men to go with us, and seeing the other party start off in good shape, we took a shore path till the hill surmounted by the fort was reached. Then the dash was made. Each man was as eager to be the first into the fort as if he alone could capture it. The hill was steep, and patches of thick brush covered the ascent. There were no orders given, and none to obey. Each pushed forward on his own impulse. "Come along, boys! We've got 'em!" was passed in low tones of voice. A short pause by those who were first at the top brought the men together, and, without the accustomed yell, we

leaped over a low earthwork and were among the cannoniers. Our attack was sudden, and the surprise complete. Some of the rebels bolted, and others fought desperately. Our men struck vigorously with their cutlasses into those surrounding the cannon, and were making havoc among them, when we were attacked with bayonets and fired into by some infantry who had crept from their bomb-proofs. Such hand-to-hand conflicts as these are usually ended quickly. The first blows are decisive, and although a man's courage may hold out, his strength will soon fail. The picture of those few moments was one not to be forgotten. Volmer was a very powerful man, and with each thrust or cut with his cutlass I could see him open the space around him. Donnelly was very skillful in the use of a cutlass, and I can never forget how heroically he stood at my right, cutting and parrying with as precise detail as if he were on drill. Jones and Gover were near me, and slashed away in all directions, but held their own. In the midst of all this, a charge of canister from each of the howitzers, and a volley from our infantry, who had got into position, were poured into a force

of rebel infantry which was to support the artillery, and being quite a distance in the rear was hurrying to their assistance.

By this surprise the whole garrison was thrown into confusion, and they threw away their arms and surrendered. Our capture consisted of two twenty-four-pounder and four twelve-pounder brass cannon, and upwards of one hundred prisoners. Our loss was five men killed. I saw some rebel dead, but never knew their loss, as the prisoners we took were hurried away, and they did not know themselves. Next to the assault and capture of Fort McAllister, this was the most gallant encounter I ever witnessed. It was about sunset when the attack was made, and almost dark before I got a chance to explore the battery. I was employed in superintending the removal of the captured property, and was in the act of descending a narrow passage into what I thought was a magazine, when I was grasped by my feet and suddenly yanked, as I thought, into eternity. When I had recovered from the surprise, I found myself in a bomb-proof with Volmer. He had several candles burning in this not spacious apartment dug into the

earth, and was plundering rebel knapsacks. The corpse of a rebel soldier lay on the floor, and the officers' side-arms, and other property we found there, were secured by Volmer and myself. I anticipated bringing home some of the most valuable of these relics, and presume I should have done so if some one from the Eighth Connecticut had not stolen them from me.

It was quite dark when Volmer and myself got back to where our men were, who we found had taken a position at a narrow part of the peninsula which was defended by the captured cannon. Here I met Mr. Lester, one of our officers, who wanted me to show him the fort, and we started together to go over the ground where the rebels had surrendered. The spot was strewn with arms, accoutrements and other warlike material, some of which we gathered up. As we were about to return, and I was cautioning the officer of the danger in the direction he was going, we were fired upon by some rebel skirmishers who had crept up in the darkness and heard our conversation. I saw the men plainly from the flash of their guns, as they lay on the ground not more than fifty

feet from us. We both started to run ; the rebel bullets whizzed in the air about us or tore up the ground at our feet. In descending a slight incline on our retreat, I stumbled over a dead rebel, and must have turned a half dozen somersaults, for I found myself whirling in all directions, with the guns and bayonets I was carrying on my shoulder. I saw Mr. Lester disappear in the darkness like a shadow, and don't believe he ever picked up his shoes any faster than he did at that moment.

By the time I had recovered from my accident, (for I was somewhat bruised in body and limb), the firing had ceased, and I walked, or rather hobbled, without stopping to collect my trophies, back to where our men were. They were engaged at the guns, having been alarmed by the firing, and as I passed in rear of them was surprised to hear that I was reported dead. One man said to another, "Butts is dead ; Mr. Lester was with him when we heard the firing and saw him fall." Another remarked, inquiringly, "Did you know Butts had passed in his chips?" And another, seeming to have more sympathy, said, "Poor fellow ! He has got a medal of

honor." "Yes," was replied, "he has got a lead one!" Such were the usual remarks among men in the service. It would seem as if they might think of their own danger. But such thoughts were expelled from their minds. In my opinion, positive disregard for any one else, and a recklessness about himself, is what makes a brave soldier or a daring sailor.

Greeley's "American Conflict" contains the following brief description of the capture of this battery :

A rebel battery having been planted near the west branch of the Nansemond, it was stormed and carried by General Getty with the Eighth Connecticut and Eighty-ninth New York, aided by Lieutenant Lamson and our gunboats,—six guns and two hundred prisoners being the net profit.

Sometime after the capture of their guns, I was one day in the camp of the Eighth Connecticut, where I chanced to pick up a Norwich Bulletin, in which an account of the affair was published, presumed to have been furnished by some soldier of the regiment. It stated that the Eighth Connecticut made a pontoon bridge of the gunboats, and after a severe battle and gallant struggle they captured the fort, guns and gar-

risson, thereby compelling Longstreet to retreat from Suffolk. I relate this to demonstrate how unreliable were many of the accounts that were given space in our newspapers in those anxious and exciting times.

General Longstreet made no further attempt to permanently hold the position on Hill's Point, the most important part of the siege being carried on near Suffolk. But a rebel cavalry force were kept employed along the lower part of the river, and occasionally a body of infantry and artillery would accompany them. Their business was to collect forage and animals from the plantations, which were well stocked, there not having been any soldiers of either army in that section previous to this time. There was no limit to the rebel pillaging ; friend and foe suffered alike by their robberies, and these raiders must have furnished a large supply for their army necessities. They also made it their duty to look out for the gunboats, and if any boats landed, or a reconnoissance was made by the sailors, to pounce upon them, or lay in ambush to capture or drive them off shore. General Peck had fortified along the narrow part of the river, which prevented the rebel

force from crossing, and relieved the gunboats from further duties in that locality. Owing to a threatening disturbance on the York river, all the gunboats except the "Stepping Stones" were temporarily withdrawn from the Nansemond.

Our duties from this time were to operate against these rebel raiders and to prevent rebel scouts and traders from crossing the river on their route between Norfolk and Petersburg. At night one or more boats of seven men each would patrol the river at suspicious points, and our men were nearly worn out with night work and want of sleep. My own duties were hazardous, and for the time being I became a scout. Although this is a perilous and fool-hardy business, men are naturally curious and fond of adventure; and few scouts who were daring, as well as cunning, were captured.

Early on the morning of the twenty-second I was sent to ascertain if a section of field artillery, that was known to be moving about in the neighborhood, had taken a position on the western branch. I discovered the battery where it was expected to be, and learned from a negro woman that it was their usual place for

bivouac. While I was making my way through the woods, on my return, I saw a rebel guard on the opposite side of the stream, and shouted out to him. After the usual salutation of unhostile pickets we carried on quite a long conversation. This fellow wanted to purchase a pipe, and offered me a pile of shinplasters (Confederate notes) that seemed to be a great deal of money, if I would accommodate him. Knowing that a brier-root pipe was a luxury in the Confederacy, I did up the one I had with me into a bundle of dried grass, and seeing it floating well underway towards my temporary friend, we bade each a farewell, and in a short time after I was on the vessel.

April 23d, we were joined again by the "Commodore Barney," "Zouave" and "Cordelin," and the two latter accompanied us up the river. As we passed the western branch we discovered that the enemy had located a battery which swept the channel. Shortly after sunset the "Stepping Stones" started in escort of the other two gunboats to run the battery. It was intended to shoot past, and not to engage the rebel artillery. As we steamed down the river, the

battery greeted us with true rebel courtesy. A perfect shower of iron from exploding shells fell about us. The "Stepping Stones" had passed without accident, when a whistle from the "Zouave" called us to her assistance. A shot had passed through her pilot-house and knocked away the steering gear, and being unmanageable, she run on top of the piles before mentioned as obstructing the channel. The enemy had sawed off the tops of the piles at low tide, so that when it was high water they were entirely submerged, and could not be seen. In this manner a vessel would be held fast if it got upon them. The rebels gave a prolonged cheer when they saw what they had done, and for nearly an hour, while we were endeavoring to release our companion vessel, they fought vigorously. A battery of field artillery and a body of infantry kept up the firing in earnest. The grandeur of the scene to those who beheld this summer's night battle can never be forgotten. To me it seemed as if I was in the midst of some grand exhibition of fireworks, which, although in battle, I was forced to admire. An officer of the Eighty-ninth

New York, who was about a mile from the action, gave me the following description of the scene :

This engagement was a most sublime tableau in the drama of this great rebellion. The little fleet of gunboats, scarcely discernible in a deep twilight, passed and repassed upon the calm water as if they were visionary actors performing their parts. The sudden flash and loud report of their cannon, the ascending shells, with sparks from their burning fuses marking their flight, as meteors imprint the passage of falling stars, the explosion of shell far above the earth, illuminated the scene with flashes of golden light, while the booming cannon, the sharp report, and flash of the rifle, the loud hurrahs of our own men, and the clang of the rebel yell, all blended with this most terrifying, yet beautiful scene.

The twenty-fourth day of the month, the "Stepping Stones" was called upon to assist the Fourth Rhode Island and Fifteenth Connecticut regiments, who were engaged with the enemy near a bridge that had been alternately destroyed by the two forces, situated above Hill's Point, on the western branch. Our captain responded to their desires by sending two twelve-pounder rifled howitzers, of one

of which I was in charge. We found upon advancing that the rebels were strongly posted in a house and along the edge of the woods, and that our troops were getting the worst of the fight. I lost two men in taking position, but our shell soon drove the rebels out of the house, and forced them from their shelter. I saw several soldiers being carried from the field, among whom was Lieutenant George Waterman, of the Fourth Rhode Island, who had been hit in two places. Since the war I asked a captain of this regiment why they recorded Hill's Point in their list of engagements, to which question he quickly answered: "By thunder, Butts, that was as sharp a fight as the Fourth was ever in. Gettysburg and other big battles were big, because a large force was engaged, but the bullets flew as thick sometimes in a small fight, and it took a darned sight more pluck to face them at Hill's Point than it did at Antietam." This statement, I think, will be agreed to by every old soldier of the Fourth Rhode Island.

Early on the morning of the twenty-sixth, the "Stepping Stones" took on board at Sleepy Hollow,

a landing on the east bank of the river, about five miles from Suffolk, a squad of the Eleventh Pennsylvania cavalry, a section of a New York battery, and a part of the Twenty-first Connecticut infantry, and transported them to the opposite and lower part of the river. They were to make a reconnoissance, in view of some military operations, and had been gone about two hours, when our captain received messages with a request to forward them to the officer in command of the expedition. Lieutenant Lawrence volunteered to deliver the papers, and asked Donnelly and myself if we would accompany him. Lawrence was a venturesome man, and had more than once got us both into trouble. We did not readily consent, offering to do the business ourselves if he would let us. The danger of being killed or captured by rebel guerillas was apparent to me, from having a thorough knowledge of their usual way of following the vessel to any part of the river in the hope of catching some of us. As Mr. Lawrence was determined to go, and we must go with him, we prepared ourselves by putting on the best clothes we had, in the event of needing them in

a rebel prison, and armed ourselves with two revolvers and a cutlass each. Leaving the vessel we took the road the troops had gone, and proceeded without seeing a rebel till we reached the village of Chuckatuck, where we stopped at the house of Dr. Briggs, a Union man, with whom we were well acquainted. While we were partaking of some refreshments that the doctor and his good wife had prepared for us, a party of thirteen rebel cavalymen rode into the yard. On seeing some of them dismount from their horses we made preparations for a defense. The family was greatly alarmed, owing, perhaps, to having been accused by the rebels of being in sympathy with the Yankees, and now by being detected in harboring them. The doctor, under no little excitement, showed us to the upper part of the house, where from a window we watched the movements of the rebel cavaliers. We felt secure in our position against the force we saw, and it was only by the greatest persuasion and regard for our friends that the lieutenant could be prevented from making an attack. They did not stay long, however, for upon inquiring for us, stating that we had been seen to

leave the vessel, Mrs. Briggs and her daughter, a young lady, who had intercepted them at the door, told the rebel officer that we had called there for some water, and had been gone but a few minutes. Thinking they would soon be able to overtake us, the rebels leaped into their saddles and galloped away. We then finished our meal, and thanking our friends for all they had done for us on this and other occasions, we continued our journey. Mr. Lawrence acknowledged to me some weeks later that his only object in carrying those dispatches was to have an interview with Miss Briggs. Proceeding on our way we soon came in sight of the rebel cavalry, who were actively engaged in a bush-whacking fight with our troops. After some difficulty, by a circuitous route through the woods, we succeeded in getting past the rebel flankers and uniting with the troops.

It was about four o'clock when we joined the troops, whom we found in line of battle, with the artillery going into position for action. In front of the line was the old bridge and the western branch of the Nansemond, along the edge of which was a small

number of rebels, who had been driven before the advancing skirmishers, and, in fear of being captured, were defending themselves as best they could. As Lieutenant Lawrence handed his letters to the officer to whom they were addressed, he inquired, "What is the danger?" and taking in the situation before an answer was made to his question, he drew his cutlass, and, turning to his two men, with a gesture of the blade, said, "Come along, you sailor men," and we dashed together down the hill to the river. We did not escape being shot at in this foolish act. Several shots were fired, and I saw the earth torn up in front of me as we advanced. One fellow, who was hid in the bushes, shot at Lawrence when he was near enough to have hit him with the gun instead. He was instantly placed *hors du combat* by a stroke from the lieutenant's cutlass. Three men, anxious to prolong their lives, leaped into the river, but when they got into the current of the stream they were obliged to take refuge behind the stumps of some piles that once supported the bridge. It would have been cold-blooded murder to shoot these fellows in such a

defenceless position. However, Lawrence emptied a revolver at one whom he saw shoot at him, but without effect, except to frighten the man, who would try to dodge by ducking his head, and he went under the water like a loon at every shot; then, half drowned and terrified, he would beg for quarters. As the result of this exploit, we captured eleven prisoners, who were taken in charge by the troops. This was one of Lieutenant Lawrence's fool-hardy actions, many others of which I could relate.

Our troops had been engaged the whole march with these bushwhackers, and the rebel cavalry, who had kept at work on them from hiding places and in the rear, had wounded two of the infantry, two of the cavalry and two artillerymen. Two cavalry, one infantry and one artilleryman had been killed in the reconnoissance.

The day following this event the "Stepping Stones" went to the landing at Sleepy Hollow to take in a supply of fresh water. Nearly all the men were on shore, engaged in getting the water to the vessel. I had been with them and had just stepped aboard, when I saw a white flag waving on

the opposite shore. I instantly felt that there was treachery in this, and that the act was performed by a band of unscrupulous guerillas, whose only motive was to decoy a boat from the vessel. I knew that I should be called upon to take charge of the boat in response to the appeal, and for the only time while I was in the service I evaded the duty. I stepped into an apartment near the engine-room without being observed, and at the same time heard the man on lookout report the object I have described. The lieutenant gave orders for a boat to be sent, and called my name. I felt like a coward, but reason soon took possession of my thoughts, and I became convinced that it was not an obligation to myself or my country to be murdered, or drawn into the enemy's hands by such an ignominious act.

I heard the lieutenant ask where I was, but no person seemed to know, till he met a man named Coleman coming aboard, who said he just saw me on shore. He did not know I had returned, hence the mistake.

The boat was finally manned with five oarsmen, a man in the bows, who held a flag of truce fastened

to a boat-hook, and Volmer, who was coxswain and in charge. Before it reached the shore, which was more than a mile from us, I stepped out upon the forward deck to watch the boat, and in time to witness a most barbarous violation of all the laws of war. As the boat approached the beach where the man was standing, a volley of musket balls was shot into them by rebel guerillas in ambush. Volmer and the sailor holding the white flag fell dead. One man was shot through the shoulder, and another in the arm. The other three were pounced upon and, with the wounded, taken prisoners. It was a sad occurrence to us, and one that provoked anger and retaliation. A more foul murder could not have been committed, even in war.

During the following night the "Commodore Barney," which had been absent for some days, came up the river and anchored near us. In the morning, an expedition comprising about one hundred seamen, in command of Lieutenant-Commander Cushing, was landed near the place where the flag-of-truce boat had been captured. The bodies of Volmer and the other sailor, whose name I have

forgotten, were found lying in the boat, and were taken to the vessel for a sailor's burial. The expedition had proceeded some three or four miles, and was about to enter the village of Chuckatuck, when it was attacked by a cavalry force of superior numbers. They made two charges upon the sailors, but were repulsed in each with considerable loss.

The first attack of the enemy was almost a surprise to our men. Coming in sight of the village as we emerged from a wood, the rebel cavalry was seen standing in line three or four hundred yards distant, awaiting our approach. The sailors were not marching regularly, as soldiers march, but were scattered for a considerable distance along the road, and on both sides, each one walking as he pleased. As soon as the rebel force were seen, and their motives realized, a part of our men rushed forward and protected themselves from the horsemen behind a rail fence at the side of the road. Others ran to assist our commander, who was giving orders to some men who were detaching a twelve-pounder howitzer from a mule team that had been used to draw the gun. All this was happening while the

rebel cavalry was crossing the distance between us. As they swooped down upon us they were met with a volley from the men behind the fence, and the next moment, when not more than thirty yards distant, Commander Cushing gave them a round of canister which broke the charge, and they turned and fled. An apprentice boy, a little chap only nine years of age, and a great favorite with the crew on the "Commodore Barney," accompanied the expedition. Captain Cushing had given the little mariner a revolver to carry, in order to lessen the weight on his belt. An officer leading the rebel assault, who had escaped many bullets that had been intended for him in the dash, rode upon the cannoneers almost to his sabre length, when this little warrior impulsively drew up the heavy weapon and fired. It brought the rebel leader from his saddle, and he fell lifeless to the ground at their feet. The horse belonging to this officer I succeeded in capturing, and it was as gallant in appearance as his master had been in action. He was very much admired by the captain of the "Stepping Stones," to whom he was presented, and several days later I left him

on board a northern-bound transport at Fortress Monroe, with a card attached to his halter, labeled "C. C. Harris, ———, N. H."

After the second repulse of the rebel cavalry, they attempted to fight us dismounted, and for half an hour quite a lively firing was kept up from places of concealment. Both sides became hotly engaged in this bushwhacking method, and both were anxious to get sight of the other. Once I thought I had outflanked a fellow that I saw shoot from behind a barn, and, while I was holding my Sharpe's rifle ready for a quick shot, a bullet from the fellow I was after struck the lock-plate of my gun, which sent me whirling on my heels, filling the air about my head with pieces of wood and iron, as well as paralyzing my right hand. Finding myself so suddenly disarmed, I gave up my flanking movement and changed to another base.

The expedition started on its return soon after this fight, in order to reach the river before dark. On the way a body of the enemy were encountered, who fired upon us from an ambuscade, and fled. In

this attack one of our men was killed, the only casualty on our side.

An incident occurred about the time of which I am writing that I shall always remember, particularly when I hear of the destruction of dwellings during the war. One day, as the vessel was descending the river, and at a point where the channel ran very near the shore, we were fired upon by a force of the enemy who had taken protection in and about a house situated near the water. This house had been a constant headquarters for rebel scouting parties, and the flag-of-truce trick was planned by the gang that was usually there. As soon as the firing commenced, our captain slowed down the speed of the vessel. We had no fear of harm from the rifle bullets, and were quietly floating past, when two women, the occupants of the house, defiantly strutted the piazza, waving a secesh flag, singing "Dixie Land," and other southern ballads. I happened to be standing near the captain and heard him say: "I wonder if them d—d fools are drunk?" I smiled at his remark, and expected to hear an order to man a gun, but he seemed to have no interest in the per-

formance. He was not one to forget such insults, however, and we all waited for the punishment that we knew was sure to come. A few days had elapsed, and the vessel was heading down the river again, when the captain called me to him and gave me orders to land, when the vessel stopped, with a boat's crew of sufficient armed men, and to enter the house and set it on fire, adding that he would shell it, but the women might be killed, and that he did not want to fight a woman with a gunboat. In obedience to these orders, I landed near the house. The men were sent in different directions as skirmishers and pickets to prevent a surprise. Donnelly accompanied me to the house. Ascending the piazza, we tried a door, which was fastened, then looked in at a window, where we saw the singers, not warbling secession airs this time, but bawling. Without ceremony we both put our shoulders to the door, and, upon entering, found one of the women too terrified to speak; the other was on her knees praying. My companion said he listened to the words and found that she was praying for Jeff. Davis, so he added, "Amen." We had no time for

explanation, and, taking a mattress from a bed that was in the room, I threw it into a fire on the hearth, and, seeing it well kindled, distributed its contents over the room. The women then became penitent, and begged to have their home spared. My heart was not of stone, even in those cruel days, and this act would not have been performed except in obedience to orders, which nevertheless I knew to be necessary and just. One of the women pointed to a bureau and a wardrobe, saying it contained all their clothing, which, with other articles, I had removed with the help of some sailors who had come in. All this was done in the quickest possible time, and, leaving the house, we all hurried to the boat. We were none too soon, for the boat was barely clear of the shore when we saw a party of rebel cavalry galloping towards us, and we were hardly out of danger when they discharged their carbines at us. As the vessel steamed away, the house could be seen enveloped in flames, and an old servant trying to keep a somewhat spirited mule from entering the burning barn, from which the boys had driven it. At last, by a flank movement the mule got the best

of the old lady, and, dashing through the flames into his stall, he was consumed with his home.

At night, on the first day of May, I was sent on shore with instructions to proceed to the rear of the enemy's line and observe their movements, as it was thought that recent operations of the Army of the Potomac would force Longstreet to abandon his attack on Suffolk.

I proceeded as far as the Petersburg turnpike, when I saw the enemy's wagons, loaded with camp equipage, moving from Suffolk, and heard railroad trains moving steadily in the same direction, which facts were made known to our military authorities before daylight the next morning. The following day and night Longstreet withdrew his troops, and the siege of Suffolk was raised. There could not have been anybody more glad of the rebel departure than the crew of the "Stepping Stones." They had been exposed for several weeks to the most hazardous trials of war. Day and night they had been harassed by the rebels, and sleep or rest had been denied except at unnaturally short intervals. There had been no fire on the vessel with which to cook

our food, the galley stove having been demolished by a rebel shell, and our provisions for a part of the time had been supplied from the army. The "Stepping Stones" had lost all her bulwarks. The upper deck had been blown off. The smoke stack was so riddled with shot that no surprise was excited at a remark of our admiral, S. P. Lee, that the funnel looked like a nutmeg grater. Two of our guns had been dismounted in action. The only anchor was a heavy iron kettle that had been taken from a rebel salt works. Our boats had been shot to pieces, and the woodwork on the sides of the vessel looked like an old target.

We remained on the Nansemond river for two weeks after the evacuation of Suffolk, when we were relieved, and the "Stepping Stones" went to Norfolk, and afterwards to Baltimore to be refitted for service.

I stayed on board the "Stepping Stones" until the fifth of the following October, (1863,) during which time, except while undergoing repairs, the vessel was actively employed in the waters of Virginia. On this day I was discharged by reason of expiration of

term of enlistment, and after a short visit to my home, re-entered the naval service and was engaged in the blockade of the southern coast.

Since the close of the war, I have never met a sailor who served in the James or Potomac river flotilla at any time during the rebellion who could not relate some hazardous story connected with the "Stepping Stones." Once I saw a man who told me, in answer to my interrogatory, that the last time he saw the "Stepping Stones" she was at anchor in a barn-yard, where she had been to reconnoitre.

"The captain wanted a good cup of coffee," I said.

"No," was the reply, "cows don't give cream down south. He was after *rebs*."

Another told me that he saw her towed out of the Nansemond river with nothing left of her but the hull, and he thought all of the "Stepping Stones" crew had headboards in the sailor cemetery at Newport News.

